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RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO IMMEDIATE 2924
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 1147
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO IMMEDIATE 6361
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE IMMEDIATE 4665
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 008306

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VE, CO
SUBJECT: GOC PEACE COMMISSIONER EXPLAINS SUSPENSION OF
CHAVEZ FACILITATION EFFORT, REVIEWS OUTREACH TO FRENCH

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the Ambassador that Venezuelan President Chavez' repeated violation of the rules set by President Uribe for Hugo Chavez' effort to promote a humanitarian accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had forced Uribe to suspend Chavez' involvement. He conceded the GOC has paid a political cost for its decision, but said delay would have resulted in an even higher political price. Uribe has reached out to key Latin American presidents who have shown no desire to become involved in the issue. Restrepo said the GOC recognizes that France remains &obsessed8 with obtaining proof of life for Ingrid Betancourt and prefers to keep the French engaged with the GOC on ways to obtain the hostages' release. He spoke with French National Security Advisor Levitte on November 28, and the two agreed to work together to achieve the hostages' release. Restrepo noted that the GOC has already said it would welcome a unilateral FARC hostage release and would also provide legal benefits to any FARC member who freed some of the group's kidnap victims.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told the Ambassador November 29 that the GOC did not seek the problems with Chavez over a humanitarian accord, but that Chavez had forced the GOC to act by repeatedly violating the rules set by President Uribe for Chavez, facilitation effort. Chavez had revealed confidential presidential conversations to the press, violated Colombia's "institutional hierarchy" by speaking directly to Colombian Army Commander Mario Montoya, and tried to marginalize the GOC by planning a meeting with a range of Colombian political figures, such as former President Ernesto Samper, in Caracas.

¶3. (C) Restrepo said that the Caracas meeting formed part of a plan by Senator Piedad Cordoba and Chavez to create a type of "alternative" or transitional Colombian government. He acknowledged that the GOC has paid a political cost for suspending Chavez, facilitation role, but said such a development was inevitable. Restrepo compared Chavez to the

FARC and other illegal armed group negotiators who constantly test the GOC limits. If the GOC had not pushed back, Chavez would have continued to assume a larger and large role. The GOC ended Chavez' role now to avoid paying a higher political cost later.

SHAPING DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL OPINION

¶4. (C) Restrepo said that the GOC is trying to shape domestic and regional opinion to support its decision to suspend Chavez' facilitation effort. The GOC has explained that Chavez and Cordoba had made little concrete progress, noting that other countries had taken steps to advance the process but that the FARC had done nothing. Moreover, the breakdown of the process reflected the debate in Latin America over two different models of democracy. Chavez favors an authoritarian, statist model while Uribe advocates a representational democracy rooted in civil liberties, open markets, and independent institutions.

¶5. (C) He said Uribe had reached out to other Latin leaders*including Brazilian President Lula da Silva, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, Peruvian President Alan Garcia, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, Uruguayan President Tabare Vazquez, and Argentine president-elect Cristina Kirchner*to explain his stance. At Correa's urging, he will attend the ceremony inaugurating Ecuador's constituent assembly. None of the leaders had voiced a desire to become involved in the issue.

MANAGING FRENCH CONCERNS

¶6. (C) Restrepo said the GOC recognizes that the French are "obsessed" with obtaining the FARC's release of French-Colombian dual national Ingrid Betancourt and that it needs to manage French concerns in a constructive fashion. French President Sarkozy had sent Uribe a letter on November 22--the day after the suspension announcement--urging him to extend Chavez' role until December 31. Uribe had responded immediately on November 23, publicly stating that the GOC would welcome a unilateral FARC hand-over of proof of life or of Ingrid to Chavez. Restrepo said the GOC wants to keep the French engaged with the GOC on ways to obtain the hostages' release. Through the French, the GOC would also control the efforts of the Swiss and Spanish to achieve a humanitarian accord. Excluding the French would only encourage them to pursue unilateral options.

¶7. (C) Restrepo said he spoke with French National Security Advisor Levitte, whom he considers to be a pragmatic, credible interlocutor, on November 28 to discuss a possible Uribe-Sarkozy phone call on November 29. Levitte said Uribe's decision to suspend Chavez' facilitation effort had surprised the French, creating a perception of failure. Sarkozy considered himself a friend of Uribe and Colombia, but faced substantial domestic pressure to produce results such as proof of life for Ingrid. The GOC and GOF need to work together to obtain the hostages' freedom.

¶8. (C) Restrepo told Levitte the GOC remains committed to obtaining the hostages' release. The GOC has already stated that it would not stand in the way of unilateral FARC actions leading to the hostages' release and has also voiced its willingness to extend legal benefits, such as suspended sentences or reduced jail time under the Justice and Peace Law, to any FARC front commanders or other leaders who free some hostages. Such benefits would apply to the release of any of the 45 hostages being considered under the humanitarian accord, as well as the hundreds of "economic" victims held by the group. Restrepo added that the GOC remained interested in discussing a humanitarian accord with the FARC, but that any future effort should be discreet with limited international facilitation.

¶9. (C) Levitte agreed to defer a Sarkozy-Uribe call until the week of December 3 to give the GOC time to develop possible mechanisms to obtain the hostages' release. Restrepo said he had also urged Levitte to serve as his contact on this issue, observing that it is important to reduce the role of the French Foreign Ministry. Restrepo said Inter-American Development Bank President and former Colombian Ambassador to Washington Luis Alberto Moreno is in Paris and would reach out to Levitte to brief him in greater detail on the reasons behind the GOC's decision to suspend Chavez' role.

¶10. (C) Asked by the Ambassador if a joint French-USG demarche would be useful, Restrepo said such a message would be harmful at this time. It would generate false expectations and put additional pressure on the GOC. The GOC believes it currently works well with the French. Restrepo said that if he needs USG help in dealing with the French in the future, he will not hesitate to ask.

GOC WOULD EMBRACE FARC PROVISION OF PROOF OF LIFE TO CHAVEZ

¶11. (C) Restrepo reiterated that if the FARC provides proof of life to Chavez or Cordoba, the GOC will publicly embrace such a move. (Note: On November 29, Colombian security forces detained three FARC militia in Bogota who possessed five video tapes, as well as letters, providing proof of life for sixteen FARC hostages. These included Ingrid Betancourt and the three U.S. citizens.) The Ambassador noted that if the FARC gives Chavez proof of life, several U.S. Congressmen might travel to Caracas to meet with the Venezuelan President. Restrepo cautioned that this would not be useful since it would inflate Chavez' importance and encourage him to seek a renewed role in a humanitarian accord.

Brownfield